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NEERAJ CHOPRA | AFP

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Back from the brink, javelin ace Neeraj rewrites history at World Championships

INDRANEEL DAS @ Chennai

AT this level, the game is played in the head, with its interludes and crescendos, its ebbs and flows, almost in a loop. The javelin final at the World Athletics Championships turned out to be one such moment for Neeraj Chopra. Like his coach Klaus Bartonietz said later, it was 90 per cent mental and 10 per cent physical effort. Clawing back from the brink is not always what Neeraj does, but on Saturday, he did that too.

In the tightest of throws, Neeraj revealed his other side: his tough mental fortitude, always considered the hallmark of a champion. Neeraj usually loves to set the pace for others to follow with good throws right in the beginning. The first two throws determine his form and subsequent position on the table. Saturday in Eugene, things were different. He fouled the first throw — the first throw of the final. His second was a modest 82.39 m. He followed it up with 86.37 m. He was away from the medal bracket after three attempts.

In contrast, his main competitor, Grenada's Anderson Peters, threw 90.54, 90.21 and 90.46 to emerge as the top performer. Germany's Julian Weber commenced with 86.86 m, while Czech Jakub Vadlejch managed 88.09 m in the third attempt. Like Neeraj explained later: "The competition was very tough and the competitors were performing very well so the situation was very challenging."

When the spear left his hand in the fourth attempt, Neeraj knew he had done something remarkable. He took his familiar tumble after releasing the javelin to 88.13 m. He yelled. And clenched his fist above his head. Relief. He knew he would be etching another piece of history, to become the second Indian to win a Worlds medal after Anju Bobby George in 2003. He overtook Vadlejch to move into second spot. "I don't like to keep things for the end because you don't know what will happen. And also others have been doing well here. I just wanted to have a good throw and I knew as soon as the javelin left my hand, it was a good throw," Neeraj said.

India's greatest moments in sports seem to be intrinsically entwined with one name, of late, Neeraj. And the recurring theme only reflects the regularity in which the Olympic champion has been turning success into a sublime art. With Commonwealth Games right around the corner, all eyes would be on him, once again. And of course, Peters will be there. Once again. P13

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The mangled remains of the SUV

Two B'luru cops, driver killed in AP road accident

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THREE people, including a sub-inspector and constable attached to the Shivajinagar police station, were killed in a road accident at Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh on Sunday. Two other cops, who were part of a team that had gone to nab drug peddlers in AP were injured. The accident occurred around 5 am when the speeding SUV they were travelling in crashed into a steel barrier near Puthalapattu in Chittoor.

The victims are Avinash Yadav (29), the SI from Basavakalyan, Anil Mulik (26), the PC from Jamkhandi, and the driver, Maxwell, a resident of Guntakal. P3

Big operation on to cover up flight crash

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

A file picture of Jakkur Aerodrome

THE mystery surrounding crash landing of a microlight, VTUMJ, around 8.30 am on July 16 has been unravelled and sources said the man piloting the aircraft was Capt Amarnath, safety manager of the Government Flying Training School and and in charge of Air Traffic Control (ATC). He was flying with a passenger.

The *TNIE* probe revealed that the aircraft, VTUMJ, is owned by Kumaraswamy. The spot where the aircraft crash landed and the axle broke can be seen and marks are visible of the broken axle scraping the tarmac after the right wheel sheared around 8.35 am when the aircraft crash landed a few seconds after takeoff. A microlight carries around 60 litres of fuel which can be extremely dangerous on impact, experts said. The big question is, despite being a government employee, how was he flying a private aircraft? Second, why was the crash not reported as mandated by law within 24 hours? Third, who gave permission for the aircraft to be dismantled in a hurry and removed from the Jakkur Aerodrome? Why did he not report the incident, having inspected the aircraft?

Two eyewitnesses confirmed to *TNIE* that they saw the accident. The owner of the aircraft, Kumaraswamy, did not bring the accident to the notice of the authorities. When *TNIE* contacted him, he threw a challenge, saying that no accident occurred and the aircraft is at the hangar of the Government Flying Training School, Jakkur. P2

EXPRESS READ

Monkeypox case in Delhi takes India's tally to 4

New Delhi: A 34-year-old man from Delhi with no history of foreign travel tested positive for monkeypox on Sunday, taking India's tally to four and prompting the Centre to hold a review meeting. One more suspected case was reported in Telangana. P9

Hubballi candle unit fire: 3 succumb to burns

Hubballi: Three workers who suffered burns after a fire broke out at a sparkle candle production unit in Hubballi on Saturday, died at KIMS Hospital here on Sunday. The trio had suffered more than 75% burns. Eight workers were injured in the fire. P5

NATION WIDE	JULY 23	JULY 24
Fresh cases	21,411	20,279
Recoveries	20,726	18,143
Deaths	47	36

KARNATAKA	JULY 23	JULY 24
Fresh cases	1,456	1,151
Recoveries	1,096	839
Deaths	0	0

JAB-O-METER
TAKE YOUR SHOT
July 23: 26,39,823 doses
July 24: 16,53,280 doses
TOTAL DOSES: 2,07,16,76,354

BHUTAN DOESN'T WANT POOR INDIAN VISITORS?

Be ready to pay ₹1,200 a day as fee over and above other expenses

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

IS Bhutan politely saying 'Indians aren't welcome'? The Himalayan nation recently announced the opening of its borders for tourists from September 23 after two years, but with a hefty levy.

Called sustainable development fee (SDF), it is $15 (₹1,200) per day per Indian and $200 (₹16,000) per person per day for other nationalities. This is in addition to the expenses of travelling, hotel bookings etc.

Bhutan apparently wants to experiment with 'high value, low volume' tourism. While tourist hotspots elsewhere, too, are looking at introducing a daily tax on their post-pandemic arrivals, Bhutan's levy is said to be the highest globally. For example, Venice is considering a daily surcharge of $3-$10 per day from next year.

"The new approach is aimed at elevating the travel experience in Bhutan and the industry through fair and healthy competition," the Tourism Council of Bhutan claimed.

But the travel sector in India read it differently. "Bhutan is politely saying 'Indians are not welcome'. The SDF has come as a sharp blow for tourists wishing to travel from India. The cost of airfare has doubled from ₹23,000 to over ₹48,000 as there are no group airfare discounts, no discount for students, no royalty waiver, no family tours," an expert in the travel sector said.

Till now, there was no levy on Indians visiting Bhutan. They just needed any identity proof — not necessarily a passport — to enter the country. In June 2020, Bhutan did impose a surcharge on visiting Indians. It amounted to 12% of the $65 that was being levied on people of other nationalities. By then the Covid lockdown kicked in and Bhutan shut itself up.

"India shares strong diplomatic, political and trade ties with Bhutan, so this levy is not going down well with us. The best way to counter it is by levying a reciprocal fee for Bhutanese nationals who travel to India," the expert suggested. With the outbreak of Covid, tourist arrivals dropped by 90% in Bhutan in 2020. Of the 29,812 tourist arrivals in Bhutan that year, as many as 22,298 were from India.

Whether the ₹1,200 SDF will be levied from Indians or revoked, only time will tell. Till then the tourist sector in India and within Bhutan will be sitting on the edge.

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